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UNCLAS YEREVAN 000774

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: REACTION FROM YEREVAN, ARMENIA: AFTER THE
VISIT OF DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE RICHARD ARMITAGE

¶1. SUMMARY: After the visit of Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage to Armenia all mass media widely covered his meetings and press conference held in Yerevan. Following his visit to Azerbaijan, some Armenian newspapers published editorials discussing the Armitage visit to the region and U.S. interests in the region in general. The following is the summary of those articles. END SUMMARY

ARMITAGE AVOIDED MEETING WITH ARMENIAN OPPOSITION

¶2. Radical oppositionist Armenian language newspaper of the "Constitutional Right" Union IRAVUNK (03/30) discusses the Armitage visit in the light of U.S interests and concern regarding the countries he visited as opposed to Russia's interests in the same countries. "The signs of a clash between two superpowers are becoming obvious in Ukraine, Armenia and Azerbaijan. The visit of Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage to these countries should probably be viewed in this light. In the elections to be held in Ukraine in October Moscow and Washington are supporting leaders from two opposite fronts." "The confrontation will become more severe in the countries of the Caucasus region, which will acquire the status of a transit zone for the upcoming ten to fifteen years. The main arena for this confrontation will be our region, then Central Asia. The main obstacle for the implementation of western programs is the lack of settlement of certain ethnic problems in the South Caucasus. According to experts in Russia and in the West, this primarily refers to the Karabakh conflict, which is the reason for the failure of several geopolitical programs to be implemented in the region. According to certain information, currently being checked, this was the reason for the Armitage visit to the South Caucasus, where he wanted to meet with the leaders of Armenia and Azerbaijan and find out about their inclination and their willingness for a quick resolution of the conflict. According to the same sources, Richard Armitage was very satisfied with the position of official Yerevan, while strongly displeased with the destructive position of Ilham Aliyev. Observers believe that this was the reason why Armitage held meetings with the Azeri opposition while he avoided meeting with the Armenian opposition."

WASHINGTON UNHAPPY WITH AZERI STATEMENTS ON KARABAKH

¶3. Pro-government GOLOS ARMENII (03/30) published a front-page article discussing possible reasons for the Armitage visit to the region. "Deputy Secretary Richard Armitage arrived in Baku on the 26th of March immediately after his official visit to Yerevan. However, until March 29 there were very few reports from Baku covering the visit of the high-ranking official from the White House. Furthermore, it was noted that of the three capitals visited by Armitage at the end of March - Kiev, Yerevan, Baku - Baku was the one with the highest priority. It should be noted that regional visits of this category involving high-ranking officials such as Richard Armitage do not happen very often. Usually this means that, given the expected developments, Washington prefers to get first hand information from the region despite the fact that U.S. Embassies in the countries concerned are providing the Administration with relevant information. The last visit of a U.S. Deputy Secretary to Armenian was in ¶1999. Then-Deputy Secretary Strobe Talbott visited Armenia because at that time it seemed that there were real opportunities for resolution of the Karabakh conflict. We think that now things stand differently. Prior to the visit of R. Armitage Assistant Secretary Elizabeth Jones mentioned that the Karabakh issue would be the cornerstone of the talks, and then she made a minor but very essential addition: 'Official Washington is interested in knowing what the priorities of the new president and the government of Azerbaijan are'." "Apparently the White House is not happy with recent statements by Ilham Aliyev, which to some extent are disturbing for the international community."

WALKER